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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1002

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 000394

SIPDIS

FOR EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2018

TAGS: PGOV PINR KDEM MY

SUBJECT: ATTACK ON DAP OFFICE IN PERAK REFLECTS PRESSURE ON OPPOSITION

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 364

Classified By: POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF MARK D. CLARK, REASON 1.4 (B AND D).

¶1. (C) Summary: An early morning May 15 attack on an opposition party office in Perak produced only minor damage and no injuries. Whether or not orchestrated by elements of Prime Minister Abdullah's UMNO party, the attack will allow UMNO to focus more pressure to bring down Perak's opposition-led state government, and support UMNO's contention that the opposition is provoking a Malay backlash.

End Summary.

¶2. (U) Two unidentified men threw three Molotov cocktails at the Democratic Action Party (DAP) headquarters in the Perak state capital of Ipoh at approximately 2:20 a.m. on May 15, according to press reports. There were no injuries and property damage was limited to two windows. Deputy Ipoh police chief, Idris Abdullah, told reporters that investigations were ongoing. Perak DAP Chairman Ngeh Koo Ham called the incident "politically motivated" and said he wanted the police to carry out a thorough investigation.

¶3. (C) DAP, a predominantly ethnic Chinese opposition party, unexpectedly emerged from the March 8 elections with the largest number of state seats in Perak, an ethnic Malay majority area. DAP, together with two other opposition parties under the Peoples Alliance, took over the state government displacing the ruling National Front (BN) coalition of Prime Minister Abdullah. The Peoples Alliance holds only a three seat majority in the state assembly. The May 15 attack occurred in the midst of rumors that some opposition assemblymen would cross over and return Perak to BN control. A senior government official from PM Abdullah's UMNO party told us recently that BN had targeted Perak state for take-over (reftel).

¶4. (SBU) Aggravating the Perak situation were controversial remarks by DAP Chairman Karpal Singh against the State Sultan questioning his constitutional powers. Perak Mufti (senior state Islamic religious leader) Harusani, known for his hardline views, added fuel to the fire by claiming on May 14 that DAP's statements insulted the Malay rulers and were tantamount to disrespecting Islam. BN-directed media and other press outlets carried Harusani's comments on May 15.

¶5. (C) DAP MP and party strategist Liew Chin Tong told us on May 15 that DAP believed the attack was connected to Karpal Singh's comments. After making brief statements, DAP intended "to downplay the incident" and wait for the results of the police investigation.

¶6. (C) Comment: In Perak and nationwide, the leading UMNO party has attempted to stir up Malay fears that recent opposition gains will erode Malay rights, challenge the

status of the traditional Malay rulers, and harm Islamic interests. Karpal Singh's ill-considered comments and the May 15 attack on the DAP office, whether or not orchestrated by elements within UMNO itself, will allow UMNO to focus more pressure on the opposition-led state government in Perak and improve UMNO's chances for regaining control of the state. The attack will also help UMNO prove its contention that supposed opposition provocation of the Malays threatens the nation's internal stability.

KEITH